



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION

Testimony of

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on

S. 893, the Highway Safety Act
of 1973

Prepared for delivery before the
Senate Public Works Committee,
Subcommittee on Transportation

March 13, 1973

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to appear here today and to assist this Committee in its very important efforts to improve the Nation's highway safety programs. The Committee is to be commended for its attention over the years in establishing and developing a national program which year by year is continuously curtailing the deaths and injuries on our highways. The Department has been criticized at times as not being totally committed to the highway safety program -- this is definitely not true. We are anxious to find programs that will work and we will continue intensive evaluation of our present programs and our research into new safety fields. Although we may differ with some in respect to the efficiency of certain programs and in the priorities within the safety area, we are totally committed to the highway safety program.

I would like to discuss this morning those provisions in S. 893 regarding the Federal Highway Administration's responsibilities for highway safety. This bill was introduced by the Committee Chairman, the Subcommittee Chairman and a number of other Members of this Committee. We have studied your proposal carefully and believe that its objectives are laudable. You are to be commended for your decision not to include in your bill several categorical grant programs -- such as the special pavement marking program and the program to eliminate roadside obstacles -- which were contained in your last year's proposal. However, we still have objections to certain aspects of S. 893.

First, I would like to comment on the funding levels in S. 893. Section 102(b) proposes \$85 million for each of the fiscal years 1974 and 1975 for the Federal Highway Administration to carry out section 402 of title 23, United States Code, with \$25 million of such 1974 authorization available only for the purchase of pavement marking equipment. We feel that these proposed fund levels are in excess of the States' needs based upon the level of funding programmed by the States in the Annual Work Programs for fiscal years 1972 and 1973. This

assessment is also supported by a review of the Comprehensive Plans submitted to date by about half the States. We recommend that the Committee adjust these authorization levels for the Federal Highway Administration portion of the 402 program to \$30 million for fiscal year 1974 and \$30 million for fiscal year 1975.

Further, we recommend that the Committee delete the provisions requiring the expenditure of \$25 million in fiscal year 1974 for pavement marking equipment. We believe that the dedication for a specific purpose of any portion of the amount authorized would severely restrict the ability of the Federal Highway Administration, the States and the local communities in the efforts to meet their diverse safety needs. Restricting Federal funds for purchase of such equipment would not necessarily be the most efficient nor economical method of handling the problem and could actually result in waste. Many jurisdictions, particularly the smaller ones, would find it more efficient, effective and economical to contract for pavement marking rather than to acquire equipment with the attendant cost of operation and maintenance. Further, the development and administration of criteria for the allocation of funds for this equipment would add

substantially to the red tape burden for the Federal, State and local jurisdictions and thus be contrary to the general demand for a reduction in red tape.

Further, pavement marking, both on and off the Federal-aid system, we believe, should generally remain a maintenance responsibility of the State and local jurisdictions. Pavement markings are temporary in nature, lasting on the average only about 12 months. For effectiveness they must be replaced regularly. In most cases, their replacement is a phase of the total maintenance effort. All States now have either statutory requirements or administrative regulations with respect to pavement markings. Most of these statutes require all State highways to be signed and striped in accordance with the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, others in accordance with their own manual which meets our requirements.

S. 893 also contains two categorical grants -- for rail-highway crossings and bridge construction and replacement -- both with their own separate authorizations, their own separate purposes and their own distribution mechanisms. At a time when the States and the Federal Government are recognizing the need to broaden Federal programs by consolidating them and the need to provide the

maximum flexibility consistent with getting the job done, these provisions go fully in the opposite direction. While we share the Committee's concern about highway safety in these two areas, we believe that States should establish programs based on their own highway safety priorities, and that funds for rail-highway crossings and bridge replacement should continue to come from money made available under the Federal-aid highway programs. In one State, bridge reconstruction might be the most sensible route toward improved safety. Another State may need grade crossing improvements. Finally, a third State may best meet its safety problems through the general upgrading and reconstruction of its rural road system. This bill does not permit such an approach. Rather, it requires that, to use Federal money available under this program, a State must establish its programs in accordance with federally-determined priorities. We do not believe that the outcome of such a categorical approach would result in a major increase in safety.

The rail-highway crossing and bridge replacement programs in this bill would authorize general funds off the Federal-aid systems. While there are needs off the Federal-aid system, it is important to recognize that almost 70 percent of the Nation's traffic is carried on

the Federal-aid systems, but that these systems account for less than 25 percent of the Nation's total highway mileage. The reason for establishing Federal-aid systems is to insure that funds are concentrated where the most traffic is carried and where the largest pay-offs exist. To authorize money now for off-system construction under Federal management would be a mistake. The 1970 Federal-Aid Highway Act increased the Federal share of the cost of projects from 50 percent to 70 percent. This increased Federal share goes into effect when fiscal year 1974 funds become available. The major justification for this increase is freeing State funds for use either on or off Federal-aid systems. Thus, the 70-30 ratio for the Federal-aid program would make available a significant portion of State funds for State roads not on any Federal-aid system. We believe that the resulting flexibility is the most sensible and reasonable way to meet needs off the Federal-aid system and thus we oppose the authorization of general funds for off-system construction in the above-mentioned categorical grant programs.

We also feel that off-system roads can be accommodated by an extension of the States' ongoing programs. In our safety standard areas the trend has been that the States.

are doing more at the local level. For example, in one mid-western State, of 22 Statewide projects to survey and identify highway accident locations, 16 were city or county administered. We foresee that this will continue. Certainly the Department wants to encourage more State and local participation in local projects.

While the highway safety program is not a new program, it is for all intents and purposes still in its formative stages. Although it was not intended to be a demonstration program, during its first six years the program has operated at relatively low funding levels. We are gaining the experience to better evaluate the program. Until we have a better understanding of the needs and priorities, we recommend against the increases in the highway safety authorizations proposed by S. 893. Also, we must concern ourselves with the optimum benefit from the expenditure of Federal funds. The President is committed to keep the Federal expenditures and the Federal budget down to a level that is not inflationary.

In summary, we think it is important to continue the highway safety programs in their present form for at least two more years, during which we will be conducting an intensive evaluation of the present program. If, after this intensive evaluation, we determine that statutory changes are necessary, we will request legislative

authority with respect to the highway safety program.
The Department will be submitting to you shortly a bill
providing for the continuation of the program during this
period.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our views.
I will be happy to answer any questions that the Subcommittee
may have.

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